

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. RES. 618

Recognizing the importance of addressing the plight of Afro-Colombians.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

AUGUST 3, 2007

Mr. PAYNE (for himself, Ms. LEE, Mr. LEWIS of Georgia, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. RUSH, Mr. MCGOVERN, Mr. HONDA, and Ms. SOLIS) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs

RESOLUTION

Recognizing the importance of addressing the plight of Afro-Colombians.

Whereas Afro-Colombians have experienced economic, social, and political injustices, as a result of their skin color and ancestry and have been targets of violence and intimidation;

Whereas Afro-Colombians today compromise over 25 percent of Colombia's population—the second largest Afro-descendant population in Latin America and the third largest outside of Africa;

Whereas the vast majority of Afro-Colombians live on the Pacific and Atlantic Coasts and the Valley of Magdalena and Cauca Rivers of Colombia within the departments of Choco, Valle del Cauca, Cauca, Nariño, Bolivar,

Magdalena, Sucre, and Cesar and endure extreme humanitarian conditions, as a result of marginalization, neglect, and the country's 40-year armed conflict and violence;

Whereas the internal armed conflict fueled by drug trafficking has generated violence against Afro-Colombian civilians and has led to the appropriation of Afro-Colombian territories and internal displacement creating huge obstacles for social and economic progress of the Afro-Colombian population;

Whereas the Government of Colombia has maintained close ties with the United States and is the largest recipient of bilateral United States foreign aid outside of the Middle East and South Asia;

Whereas the Government of Colombia has received an estimated \$6,000,000,000 in military, counter-narcotics, and other aid since 2000, primarily through congressionally-legislated Plan Colombia;

Whereas, although a major beneficiary of United States foreign assistance, the Government of Colombia has not effectively addressed racial discrimination, violence, and social and political marginalization facing Afro-Colombians;

Whereas Colombia has the second largest population of internally displaced people in the world, and Afro-Colombians are the most affected, compromising an estimated 40 percent of Colombia's 3,800,000 internally displaced persons;

Whereas an estimated 76 percent of Afro-Colombians live in conditions of extreme poverty, 42 percent are unemployed, and only 2 percent are able to attend college;

Whereas the life expectancy for Afro-Colombians is two decades shorter than the national average, with an estimated 82 percent of Afro-Colombians lacking access to basic public services;

Whereas Afro-Colombians are underrepresented in positions of leadership, power, and authority within the social, political, and economic spheres of the country, yet in recent years, Afro-Colombian representation in government has increased: currently there are 2 Afro-Colombian senators and 7 Afro-Colombian members of the House of Representatives;

Whereas the department of Choco, a region that has the largest percentage of Afro-Colombians with an estimated 70 percent of the total population of the state, also suffers from the lowest per-capita level of government investment in health, education, and infrastructure, with a significant proportion of the population facing an increase in illiteracy;

Whereas the Colombian healthcare system covers only 10 percent of Afro-Colombian communities, compared to 40 percent of non-black communities;

Whereas the 1991 Colombian Constitution and Law 70 of 1993 granted Afro-Colombians the legal titles to their ancestral land and the ownership of the tropical rainforest;

Whereas, however, Afro-Colombians have been forcibly and violently displaced from their lands;

Whereas the aerial herbicide spraying and fumigation of coca crops has also resulted in the destruction of the legitimate subsistence crops of Afro-Colombian communities and a corresponding increase in food instability and in-

ternal displacement amongst Afro-Colombians in territories where fumigation occurs;

Whereas although Articles 6 and 7 of the International Labor Convention mandates that United States assistance to Colombia is contingent upon human rights standards for indigenous communities, Afro-Colombians are not included in the language for human rights certification conditions;

Whereas the spread of oil palm cultivation is linked to grave human rights violations, internal displacement, and the killings of Afro-Colombian leaders and results in the weakening of territorial and environmental rights of Afro-Colombian communities;

Whereas human rights violations against Afro-Colombians, including bombings, massacres, and kidnappings go uninvestigated and unaddressed by the judicial system;

Whereas the deaths and disappearances of Afro-Colombian community activists and human rights defenders are uninvestigated and leaders within the Afro-Colombian communities continue to endure death threats and are specifically targeted by left-wing guerillas and right-wing paramilitaries;

Whereas Colombia's paramilitary demobilization process has led to continued displacement, human rights violations, and armed territorial disputes in Afro-Colombian communities;

Whereas Afro-Colombians suffer disproportionately from extrajudicial executions, massacres, death threats, disappearances, displacements, and forced conscription;

Whereas violent terrorist attacks continue to occur at an alarming rate in Buenaventura, a city with a majority

Afro-Colombian population, resulting in the frequent loss of innocent civilians and making that city one of the most dangerous in Colombia;

Whereas in 2002 in Bojaya, Choco, 119 unarmed Afro-Colombian civilians—including 45 children—who had taken refuge in a church were massacred, as they were caught in the crossfire between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) and United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) paramilitaries;

Whereas following the massacre in 2002, civilians suffer greatly due to terrorist attacks in Buenaventura, as the FARC continues to commit violent acts against Afro-Colombians; and

Whereas, although persons of African descent have made significant achievements in education, employment, economic, political, and social spheres in Latin America, the vast majority are marginalized: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved*, That the House of Representatives—

2 (1) recognizes and honors Afro-Colombians for
3 their contributions to the economic, social, and cul-
4 tural fabric of Colombia;

5 (2) calls upon the Government of Colombia to
6 take measures to combat racial discrimination,
7 human rights violations, and condemn all attacks
8 and forms of racial discrimination against Afro-Co-
9 lombians;

1 (3) urges the Government of Colombia to de-
2 mand politicians linked to para-politics scandals are
3 investigated and brought to justice;

4 (4) urges the Government of Colombia to de-
5 velop and implement a policy that ensures the prop-
6 er execution of assistance programs designated for
7 Afro-Colombians and internally displaced commu-
8 nities; and

9 (5) encourages the United States Government
10 to ensure that the previous consultation mechanism
11 with Afro-Colombians and marginalized groups is
12 applied in the negotiation for a free trade agreement
13 and the implementation of Plan Colombia.

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